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THE NIVKHI

S. V. IVANOV, M. G. LEVIN and A. V. SMOLYAK

(based on data by A. M. Zolotarev)

General Information

The Nivkhi live on the lower reaches of the Amur and adjacent areas, as well as on Sakhalin. They are sharply different in language from their neighbors, who speak languages of the Tunguso-Manchurian group, and belong to the so-called paleo-Asiatic peoples.

The name of the people derives from their name for themselves, Nivkh, or "man." They were known in Russian pre-Revolutionary literature as "Gilyaks." This word evidently derives from "Gileke" and "Gilyami," as the Nivkhi are called among Tunguso-Manchurian peoples.

The census of 1926-27 set the number of Nivkhi at 4076 persons (1700 on Soviet Sakhalin and 2376 on the continent). In addition, according to data in 1928, 111 Nivkhi lived in the formerly Japanese part of Sakhalin.

Thus, the Nivkhi consist of two groups territorially: the continental, or the Amur, group, and the Sakhalin group. The continental Nivkhi live along the Lower Amur, along the coast of the Amur Estuary, and in the adjoining areas along the Tatar Strait and the Sea of Okhotsk. On the Amur, the Nivkhi villages are interspersed among Russian and Negidal villages. The Nivkhi village farthest up the Amur is Pad; others are situated lower on the Amur and its estuary; in the south they reach as far as Cape Lazarev; the northernmost village in the estuary is Kul' (181 km from Nikolayevsk-on-the-Amur). Individual families live among the Ul'chi. In the past, some Nivkhi groups were found as far as the Uda River. In 1884, the well-known Russian traveler Middendorf encountered them on the Chumikan. In Sakhalin, the Nivkhi are living today both on the western and eastern coasts, as well as along the middle reaches of the Tym' River. On the western coast, their main mass is concentrated in the Rybnovskiy Rayon. In the Aleksandrovskiy and Shirokopadskiy Rayons there are only small groups of Nivkhi, who remained there after the resettlement of a large group in the Kirovskiy Rayon. The population of the latter is today almost entirely concentrated on one large collective farm, Chir-Unvd. On the eastern coast, the southernmost point is the village of Nyyvo; farther north, there are large villages, Dagi, Chayvo and Pil'tun, where the former residents of the tiny hamlets scattered along the coast have

resettled. In southern Sakhalin, individual families live in the village of Taran, Poronayskiy Rayon.

Administratively, the Nivkhi territory belongs to Sakhalinskaya Oblast and the Nizhne-Amurskiy and Takhtinskiy Rayons of Khabarovskiy Kray.

The Nivkhi language is usually classed with the group of paleo-Asiatic languages. But among the languages of this group, it has a distinct place.

In its structure, the Nivkhi language belongs to the synthetic-agglutinative languages. The synthetic features are the fusion of the nominal and verbal elements (kkan—dog; pil'a-gan—big dog). The agglutinating features include the addition of affixes (kkan-gu—dogs). The phonetics of this language are very complex. The language has the following parts of speech: nouns, numerals, pronouns, verbs, and adverbs. The adjectives have many similarities with verbs. The Nivkhi numerals are interesting: in the Nivkhi language, there are no numerals common to all objects. Instead, there are various groups of numerals, for the counting of: 1) long objects (sticks, staffs, trees, plants, etc.); 2) small round objects; 3) large, round, cylindrical objects and objects of indefinite shape; 4) thin, flat objects; 5) animals and insects; 6) people and manlike spirits; 7) paired objects. For example, t'ig'r-n'ekh—one tree; k'u-n'ik—one bullet; tyv-n'akkr—one house; tamkh-n'rakh—one tobacco leaf; kkan-n'yn—one dog; nivkh-n'in—one person; mu-n'im—one boat; t'u-n'irsh—one sled; and n'a—one handbreadth, etc.

As a result of the Nivkhi's close ties with the Tunguso-Manchurian peoples, the Nivkhi language contains a large number of words in common with the languages of these peoples.

In the Lower Amur Basin, the Nivkhi are unquestionably old inhabitants. There are enough grounds to consider them the most direct descendants of the neolithic population of this territory. This population left behind numerous pits—marks of old dugouts of square or round shape, polished stone implements, and a special type of ceramic ware—flat bottomed, with spiral ornament. Such pits have been found both along the Amur and in Sakhalin. There are different points of view as to which is the older site of Nivkhi habitation—the Amur or Sakhalin. The well-known student of the Amur peoples, Academician L. Shrenk, held that Sakhalin was the original home of the Nivkhi, whence they spread to the continent. The opposite viewpoint was expressed by L. Ya. Shternberg, who insisted on the continental origin of the Nivkhi and their considerably later migration to Sakhalin. Historical data indicate a larger northward distribution of the Nivkhi along the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk in the past. It is also beyond question that the Nivkhi once lived farther up the Amur than they do today. According to Chinese sources, tribes of Chi-Lia-Mi lived on the lower reaches of the Amur in the 12th century; there is every reason to conclude that these were Gilyaks, or Nivkhi.

The first Russian data on the Nivkhi date to the 17th century. According to these data, the Nivkhi did not pay tribute to China. The first Russian to travel down to the mouth of the Amur was the "writing chief" Vasiliy Poyarkov (1643-1646). He was followed by Yerofey Khabarov, Ivan Nagiba, the boyar's son Pushchin, the official Stepanov and others. In the Cossack reports of the 17th century, both the Nivkhi and the Ul'chi are referred to as "Gilyak peasants." According to these reports, they lived in large villages in wooden winter houses, flanked by barns, racks for hanging fish and log structures for bears. The Nivkhi wore clothing of fishskins and animal pelts; they kept many dogs, engaged in fishing, and their diet consisted mainly of fish. They traded with the Chinese, Ainu and Tungus.

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Economy and Everyday Life

The Nivkhi's basic occupations were fishing and sea hunting. The most important fishing activities involved runs of the salmon species—Siberian salmon and humpback salmon. These were caught in "zyyezdki," nets and seines. A "zayezdok" was an L-shaped barrier of thick stakes and twigs, set at right angles to the shore with the transverse bar along the current. On this bar, the Nivkhi set up a drawnet, near which they kept watch in a boat. The fish, going in a solid mass along the shore, hit the wall of the trap and turned and swam into the net. When they saw the movement of the signal ropes, the fisherment lifted the net and emptied it into the boat. By this method, several days' fishing produced 4000–5000 fish, which quite filled the needs of the fishermen. The "zayezdok" was usually built jointly by several families.

The seines, fairly small in size, were formerly made of nettle fiber. They were pulled by two or three fishermen, one of whom walked along the shore, while the other two were in a boat. Later, the Nivkhi learned from the Russians to sew together large seines. Beluga and sturgeon were caught with harpoons and hook-tackle—the hooks at the end of short cords, attached to a long rope stretched in the water.

Very important to the Nivkhi was fishing for (single-net fish), carried on throughout the year. These were caught with fishing rods, fixed nets (winter and summer), floating nets (summer) and seines (during the spring and autumn seasons).

The Nivkhi living in Sakhalin and in the estuary did a good deal of sea hunting. They hunted sea lions and seal. The former were caught in large fixed nets. Seal were hunted in early spring, at the first sign of breaking ice. They were killed with harpoons and clubs as they climbed up to warm themselves on the ice floes. Seal-hunting continued into the summer as well. In open waters, they were hunted with a floating harpoon (lykh). This consisted

Sewing together a seine.

of a small board equipped with a harpoon-tip, attached to a stick from 10 to 30 meters long. The lykh was lowered into the water; the hunter hid himself nearby in his boat or on the shore. When he caught sight of his quarry, the hunter carefully directed the lykh at it and quickly drove it into the animal.

As compared with its role among other Amur peoples, hunting played a smaller part among the Nivkhi. The hunting season began in autumn, after the end of the fish-runs. At this time bears come down to rivers to treat themselves to the delicacy of fish, and the Nivkhi awaited them with bows or guns. Sometimes they set crossbows for them. In winter, they hunted bears with spears. The bear season was followed by the sable-hunting season. Sable and certain other fur animals (otter, lynx and marten) played an important part in the Nivkhi economy. The Amur Nivkhi went out every autumn in their large, heavy boats made of boards, to hunt sable in Sakhalin, returning from there only in early spring. This was due to the abundance of sable on Sakhalin. The Nivkhi set numerous traps along rivers and on fallen trees which served the sables as crossings.

The main weapon in hunting was the gun, which in the early 20th century replaced the compound Nivkhi bow with its horn covering. However, the bow was preserved in the bear festival and in children's games. Squirrel and foxes were hunted with dogs. Crossbows were set for both small and large animals.

Agriculture already began to appear among the Nivkhi in the middle of the 19th century, when they first learned to plant potatoes. Individual Nivkhi had carted goods in the past and hired out for work in other capacities.

Already, before the advent of the Russians, there were expert smiths in some of the villages, who reforged Japanese, Chinese, and later Russian metal articles for their own needs; they made knives, straight and curved, adapted to wood-carving; arrowheads, tips for harpoons, spears, and so forth. The smiths used double bellows, an anvil and hammer. Pieces of massive chains preserved from the past speak of the high skill of the old smiths.

The Nivkhi widely employed silver and copper inlay on spear-tips. The old men wove ropes from bast and nettle, built sleds and made dog-harness.

Men's work included fishing, hunting, making the tools required in these occupations, including tackle and means of transportation, the preparation and transportation of firewood, and blacksmithery. The women processed the skins of fish, seal and dogs, prepared birchbark for various uses, sewed and ornamented clothing, made birchbark utensils, gathered plant products, did the housework and took care of the dogs.

By the time the Far East was Sovietized, commodity relations were quite strongly developed among the continental Nivkhi. The old forms of collective production and distribution had almost entirely disappeared under the impact of the increasing property differentiation. Many fishermen and hunters who lacked the necessary gear were compelled to hire out as lumberjacks and other hired laborers, transport goods, etc. The smallness of the income from fishing made the Nivkhi turn to agriculture. Fur-hunting played an insignificant role among the Amur Nivkhi. The catch of seal, white whale and sea lion went mainly to fill the needs of the hunters and their families. Fishing was done by cooperative parties usually consisting of 3 to 7 persons. Workers were also hired, on a half-share basis. Some Nivkhi worked during the fishing as hired laborers, processing the fish.

Fishing was also highly important among the Sakhalin Nivkhi; but in addition, they widely engaged in hunting sea animals, bears, sable, etc.

The food staple of the Nivkhi was always fish, most often jerked; yukola took the place of bread. Meat was eaten rarely. Food was prepared with

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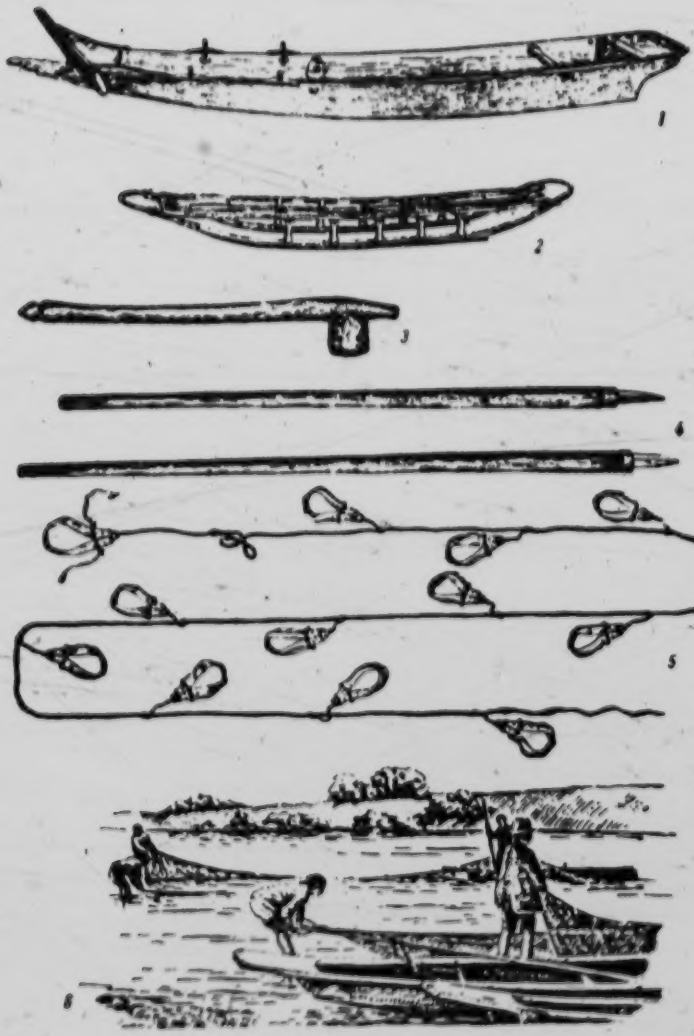

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Means of transportation and hunting:
1—river boat made of boards; 2—old dogsled; 3—club for killing seal; 4—brake poles used in steering sled; 5—old dog-harness; 6—fishing with seines.

Food was prepared with 262
fish-oil or seal-fat. A favorite delicacy was mos', prepared with fishskins, 252
seal-fat, berries, rice, and sometimes crumbled yukola. Another favorite
dish was talkk—a salad of raw fish, garnished with wild garlic. The Nivkhi 439
became acquainted with rice, millet and tea from the time when they traded 262

with the Chinese. After the appearance of the Russians in the Amur region, the Nivkhi began to use small quantities of bread, sugar and salt.

The immemorial, and until recently the only, domestic animal of the Nivkhi was the dog. It served as a draught animal and provided for fur clothing and meat for food; it was widely used as a medium of exchange and played an important part in religious ideas and rituals. The number of dogs in a household was an index of wealth. As a rule, every household kept 30–40 dogs, which demanded considerable care. They were fed chiefly fish and seal-fat; feed had to be stocked for the whole winter, when dogs were used most as draught animals.

The old sled of the Nivkhi, which was still found in use by Shrenk in the middle of the last century, was so narrow that the driver sat astride it, resting his feet on small skis; sometimes he raised himself and ran in this position on skis. The runners of this sled were curved both in the back and in front. The dogs were harnessed to the towing strap alternately on either side, rather than in pairs. The harness was a simple collar, so that the dog pulled with the neck.

Until quite recently, dog races were still a part of the bear festival; in these, the Nivkhi used the old sled and the old type of harness. The harness and the sled which appeared among the Nivkhi in the beginning of the 20th century were considerably different from the old type. They were of the so-called Eastern Siberian type; the sled was of greater capacity and equipped with a vertical shaft-bow and paired harness, not in collars but in yokes, which the dogs pulled with the chest.

The development of the carting trade brought with it a new type of sled. Its greater size and stability permitted the transportation of up to 200 kg of goods. It was usually drawn by 9 to 11 dogs. The best trained and most valuable dog was the leader. The driver—kayur—usually called out his directions to this dog. The dogs were stopped with a shouted order and a brake pole. Dogs were sometimes also harnessed to a boat on a longer tow strap.

The horse as a draught animal appeared among the Nivkhi relatively recently.

In addition to dog transportation, winter travel on land was done by skis—bare skis without fur lining, or skis lined with seal fur. The former were used for short trips; the latter, for distant expeditions during the fur-hunting season. The Nivkhi skis were distinguished by the wooden strips nailed over the fur.

Travel along the rivers (particularly in Sakhalin) was in light hollowed boats made of poplar. These dugouts were so light that they were carried by hand across barriers (shallows and isthmuses). They were propelled with oars or poles (usually employed for upstream travel). For long-distance travel, the Nivkhi had a large boat similar to that of the Ul'chi, Nanays and Orochi. It was made of three wide cedar boards, of which the bottom one was bent upward in front, projecting like a spade. It was rowed with 2 to 4 pairs of oars, by lifting alternately the right and the left ones.

The Nivkhi villages were usually situated near the mouths of spawning-rivers, and seldom exceeded 20 dwellings. Until recently, the dwellings of kinsmen were set side by side. Some 40 to 50 years ago, the Sakhalin Nivkhi still widely used the dugout house. It was made by digging a pit some 1.25 meters deep, over which a wooden framework was built of thin logs, and covered on the outside with earth. The smoke vent served as a window as well; the hearth was built in the center, and plank beds were set around the walls. At the end of the 19th century,

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View of a village.

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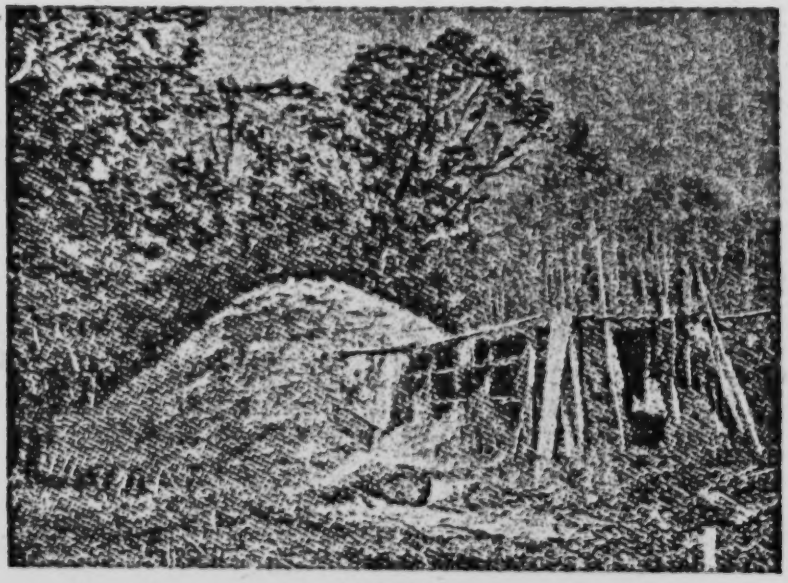

Mud hut.

342 175 the entrance to the hut was no longer from the roof, but through a long low corridor.

From about the period of the Ming dynasty, the Nivkhi dugouts began to give way to Manchu fanzas of the frame type, which spread over the entire Nanay territory and were taken over by the Nivkhi. The structure and lay- [171] out of the winter dwelling were similar to those of the Ul'chi. In summer- time, the Nivkhi usually lived in summer dwellings built on piles some 1.5 m high. They usually consisted of two parts: the rear part, which served as living quarters and was lighted by an opening in the roof, and the front part, which served as a warehouse. The summer house was usually sur- [171] rounded by racks for jerking fish and storehouses on piles for storing various products. The general appearance of the Nivkhi summer dwelling was similar to the Ul'chi summer storehouse.

291 The old summer dress of the Nivkhi men was similar in many features to that of the Nanays. It consisted of trousers (varsh), a robe, reaching to the knees and closing from left to right, footwear of sealskin, and a conical birchbark hat (kh'ifkh'akk). The trousers and robe were made of blue or gray cotton cloth. The women's summer robe of fishskin or fabric was longer, and was decorated along the edge with copper disks. In winter, an outer garment of dark fur, with the fur outside, was worn above the robe. During sled trips, the men wore a kilt of sealskin above the fur garment, to save it from wear (sealskin was not used for dressing the dead). The head [531] was protected by earmuffs and a fur hat. Men's and women's clothing differed only in that the latter had more embroidery and appliqués, and was [439] made of a greater variety of materials (silk, cloth, lynx-fur on the hat).

Formerly, the Nivkhi obtained material for their clothes from Chinese and Russian merchants. Footwear, robes and overcoats were made of

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Footwear, robes and overcoats were made of specially prepared skins of carp, Siberian salmon and pike, as well as seal and elk skin, dog-fur, etc. 291 237

Before the Revolution, neither men nor women cut their hair; they wore it braided—the men, in a single braid, the women, in two braids. 302

Social Relations and Religion

Problems of the ancient social order of the Nivkhi are particularly interesting in connection with the study of the origins of the family and marriage. Thanks to the well-known works of the Russian ethnographer L. Ya. Shternberg, we have a detailed descritpion of the clan organization of the Nivkhi (or Gilyaks, as they were called in the past) at the end of the last century. Shternberg conducted ethnographic studies of the Nivkhi for a number of years, and collected materials which attracted the attention of F. Engels. Engels wrote about Shternberg's work in a special article, "A Recently Discovered Instance of Group Marriage" (first published in Die Neue Zeit, 1892, and later, as an appendix to "The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State"). 114

The Nivkhi were divided into exogamous clans (kk'khal), of which there were several dozen. Most of their names were taken from rivers, such as: Mybing, i.e., "those who live on the My River," Chombing—"those who live on the Chom River," and so on. Already in Shternberg's time, the Nivkhi clans no longer represented territorial and economic entities. A Nivkhi village was inhabited by members of various clans. However, the Nivkhi clan preserved many forms of social ties among clan kinsmen, expressed chiefly in family and marriage norms, and in religious rituals and customs. 614

The Nivkhi clan was patriarchal, with but a few relics of the more ancient matriarchal order. These relics included the special relationship with the mother's brother, who took part in receiving ransom for the murder of his sister's son, and also the custom of sending gifts and a share of every catch to sons- or brothers-in-law—which may have been a remnant of matrilocal marriage. [60]

The Nivkhi clan was a group of kinsmen along the male line, bound by strictly observed rules of clan exogamy: mutual duties in payment of blood-money (tkhusind), which replaced the vendetta among the Nivkhi; participation of clan members in the payment of bride-price and burial expenses; and the common clan cult (clan fire, clan organization of the bear festival, the clan storehouse for ritual objects, etc.).

In distinction to the Tunguso-Manchurian peoples of the Amur region, the Nivkhi took their wives, not from the clan to which they gave their women, but from a third clan. Thus, each clan was bound by marriage ties to at least two other clans. For example, the Khyyyegnung clan took its women from the Kegnang, the Kegnang from the Tykfing, and the latter from the Khyyyegnung. This was connected with the Nivkhi rule, which, in distinction to those of their Tunguso-Manchurian neighbors, permitted a man to marry the daughter of his mother's brother, but not the daughter of his father's sister. The clan from which men of a given clan took their wives was the former's akhmal'k (father-in-law); conversely, the clan to which the women of a given clan were given was called ymg'i (son-in-law). Hence, the Nivkhi themselves defined the clan as follows: "We have one (i.e., a common) akhmal'k (father-in-law), one ym'gi (son-in-law), one fire, one bear, one tkhusind (blood-money), and one sin."

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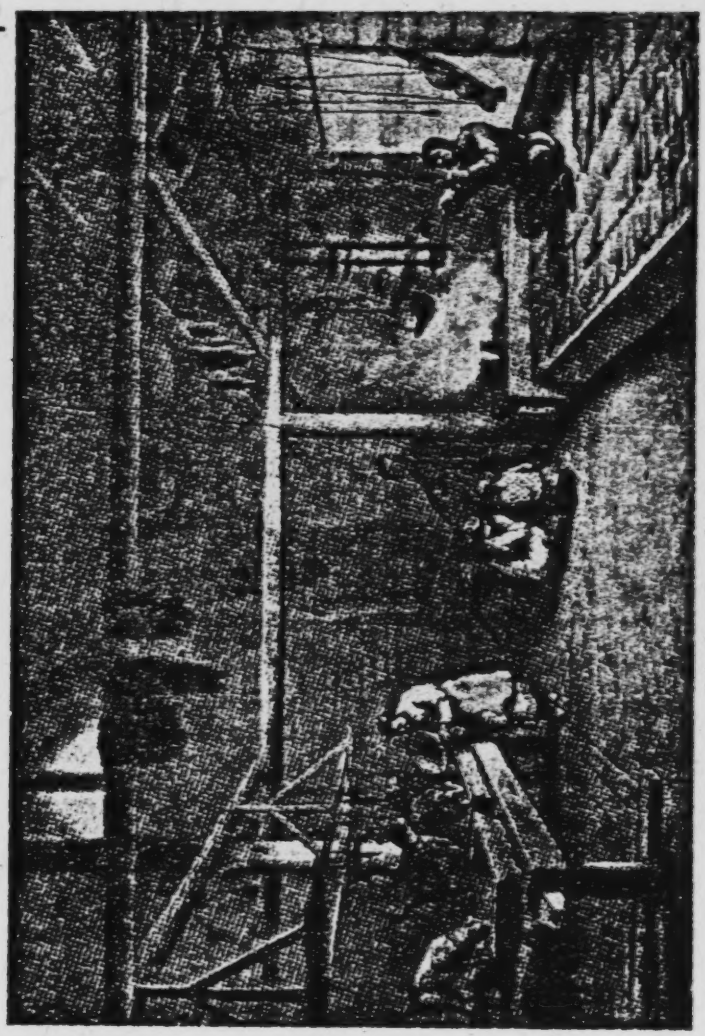

Interior of an old winter dwelling.

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Child's cradle.

The Nivkhi clans could split up and settle in different places; they could also accept (adopt) people of other clans and tribes. When a clan divided, the Nivkhi broke the flint which was kept by the eldest in the clan (the flint was used to obtain ritual fire, such as the fire for cooking bear meat), and gave a piece to the part that split off.

Long ago, the Nivkhi had the institution of vendetta. All members of a clan were bound to avenge a murder upon all the men of the murderer's clan. Later, vendetta began to be replaced by blood-money (tkhusind). In reconciling clans through the payment of blood-money, the principal role was played by intermediaries of a neutral clan (khlay-nivkh). It was their duty to negotiate the size of the blood-money and to persuade the enemy

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parties to agree. When agreement was reached, the khlay-nivkh came to the offending clan with men of the victim clan, fully armed, and a duel was enacted between the representatives of the two clans. Then each clan representative killed a dog, and peace was considered established. After that, the ransom was paid. It consisted of coats of mail, spears, silk materials and other valuable objects.

The Nivkhi had a classificatory system of kinship. But, in distinction to the Tunguso-Manchurian system, the specific term of kinship among them applied always to persons of one, rather than different generations. As Shternberg showed, the classificatory system of the Nivkhi reflected even in his time the existing marriage norms. The Nivkhi retained until the end of the 19th century some remnants of group marriage. These relations were possible only for persons of the same generation, and were categorically forbidden among persons of different generations.

All the members of a clan were divided into four age groups: 1) grandfathers and great-grandfather (atak); 2) fathers (ytyk), their brothers (tuvng), the husbands of the mother's sisters and the brothers of the husbands of the mother's sisters; 3) brothers and sisters (tuvng); and 4) children (ola).

Trade ties with China and the transformation of fur-hunting, and later of fishing, into economic activities directed to commercial ends stimulated the disintegration of the clan order among the Nivkhi, which occurred first among the Amur Nivkhi. The latter had early begun to trade with the Manchus. Nivkhi merchants sailed up the Sungari to San-hsing, and bartered furs and beluga backbones for tea, tobacco, fabrics and metal articles. They also bartered with the Ainu, the Japanese and with other neighbors. Members of the Tvabing clan, for instance, were for a long time the middlemen between the Sakhalin Nivkhi and the Ainu. Thus, long before Russian colonization, the Nivkhi began to be divided into rich and poor. The rich could have several wives and 3-5 slaves. The rich man's bride-price always included large quantities of imported valuables. But commodity relations developed slowly, since exchange was only in the medium of furs and, to a lesser extent, fish. The mass of the Nivkhi continued in a subsistence economy.

Slaves did only housework. They could set up their own households and marry free women. The slave's descendants of the fifth generation were considered free. On the whole, slavery was not widespread among the Nivkhi and was of a patriarchal character.

At the end of the 17th and in the 18th centuries, the Manchus established among the Nivkhi, as well as the Nanays, the posts of khalada— clan elders, and gasyanda—village elders.

After the middle of the last century, the disintegration of the Nivkhi subsistence economy proceeded more rapidly. After the Nivkhi had finally become a part of Russia, slavery disappeared; a new form of exploitation appeared, in the institution of "half-shares." Nivkhi who lacked the implements of production fell into the position of "half-sharers." The catch was divided according to the number of participants, but those who used the implements of others had to yield half of their share to the owner.

Before the Revolution, the Nivkhi were officially considered Orthodox Christians, but their views remained animistic. They thought of the island of Sakhalin as an anthropomorphic creature; similar ideas were held about trees, mountains, rivers, water, earth and cliffs. The killer whale was in their thinking an yz'—a "master" of other animals. Almost every natural phenomenon had its yz'. The chief of these were Pal-yz'—the "master" of the mountains and the taiga, and Tayrnadz, or Tol'yz'—the "master" of

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Feeding a bear.

the sea. Both the Nivkhi dwelling and every river had its yz', who took care of man. The sky was thought to be inhabited by "sky people." The sky people—the sun and moon—had no close relations with man, but the Nivkhi were always in close relations with the yz'. "Receiving" from them fish, sea animals, etc., the Nivkhi had to "give" them in return—to sacrifice to them. The cult connected with the "masters" of nature was of pronounced clan character.

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The "mountain man," the "sea man" and the bear, in the Nivkhi thinking, were common to the clan. And the bear festival (chkhyf-le-kherno—"bear game") was a clan festival. The clan which celebrated the festival assumed the expense and work of arranging it. This festival was connected with the cult of the dead, since it was usually held in memory of a dead clan kinsman. A bear cub was caught in the taiga or bought and placed in a special frame building. The cub was reared by members of the given clan. On specific days it was taken out and led on a chain through the encampment. The bear was reared for several years. Before the festival, all the clan members gave the bear's master products and money. The master's family prepared food for the holiday (usually held in February), built a platform—a shooting ground with one or several pairs of trees—poles hung with ritual shavings (inau) and covered with carving. The bear was tied between them. The honorary duty of killing the bear was given the narkha—people of the clan in the relationship of "son-in-law" to the clan holding the festival. The festivities sometimes lasted several days and consisted of a complex ceremony of killing the bear with a bow and arrow, ritual feasting on the bear meat, the sacrifice of dogs, and so on. The bearskin with the head was lowered into the yurt through the smoke vent on a high pole. In the intervals between eating, there were dog races, shooting matches with bow and arrow, fencing with sticks, and dancing. After the festival the head and bones of the bear, the ritual utensils et cetera were put away in the special clan storehouse. Wherever a Nivkhi lived, he retained his contact with his clan storehouse, where he always brought the skulls of the bears he killed.

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The burial rites of the Nivkhi differed sharply from those of the Tunguso-Manchurians of the Amur regions. The Nivkhi characteristically

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764 burned their dead, but they also buried them in the earth. During the burning, they broke the sled on which they had brought the corpse and killed dogs. Their meat was cooked in large cauldrons and eaten on the spot. The "sendoff of the soul" took place several days later, on the day of the "lifting the tree," as the cemetery was called. There they built a raf—a little hut for the figurine which represented the dead.

At the cemetery more dogs were killed on this day. The women sewed clothing for the figurines. Models of hunting and fishing gear were attached to the figurine, and a variety of household articles were laid with it. The real gun, kettle, teapot and other articles were broken nearby. It was held that on this day the soul migrated in a sled into the world of the dead, situated underground. The dead were buried only by members of their clan.

A variety of taboos were connected with the fire, whose "master" spirit was an old woman. The shaman's duties among the Nivkhi were connected with "healing" and with the constant struggle with the evil spirits, milk and kinr, which caused illness and death. The shamans had their own helping spirits (kekhn). However, shamanism was not greatly developed among the Nivkhi. It is interesting that the shamans did not take any part in the clan cults.

Folk Arts

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The traditional poetic works of the Nivkhi are varied. There are songs of various kinds, tales, proverbs and sayings, and also myths, reflecting the most ancient ideas about the origin of the world, of nature, of various natural phenomena, and of spirits. There are also epic and historical tales (tyl'ugd), describing hunting feats, wars between clans, etc. The Nivkhi myths also include the Tunguso-Manchurian myth about the three suns. According to one of the Nivkhi myths, people descended from trees: the Nivkhi descended from the larch, the Orochi, from the birch.

531 Among the decorative arts, the most developed were carving on wood and bone, embroidery and appliqué on robes made of fabrics and fishskins. Most of the articles of daily use—wooden troughs, spoons, dippers, birchbark boxes, knife handles, spear-tips, pillows, blankets, robes, hats and mittens—were covered with spiral-ribbon designs, executed with great taste and skill. Wood-carvings also decorated barns, burial huts and dwellings. In motif and style, the Nivkhi design is related to the design of the Ul'chi and Nanays. The principal motifs of the ornamentation of clothing and birchbark utensils were symmetrical combinations of bent lines, often almost spiral, and stylized representations of birds. Appliqués from fishskin, fabrics and birchbark were cut out according to birchbark or leather patterns, transmitted from generation to generation. Robes, birchbark boxes and hats, and other articles had standard combinations of ornamental motifs, reproduced on articles of specific groups. The main colors in appliqués of birchbark, fishskin and fabric were black, white, red and blue. Appliqué on birchbark, fabric and fishskin was women's work; carving on wood and bone was done by men. Many women were famed for their skill and craftsmanship.

The origin of the Nivkhi ornamental art, as well as the art of other Amur peoples, has not yet been sufficiently established. Some of the motifs (such as roosters, dragons and monster-serpents) were unquestionably suggested by Chinese art and mythology, but underwent considerable local transformation; others (spirals) probably date back to neolithic times.

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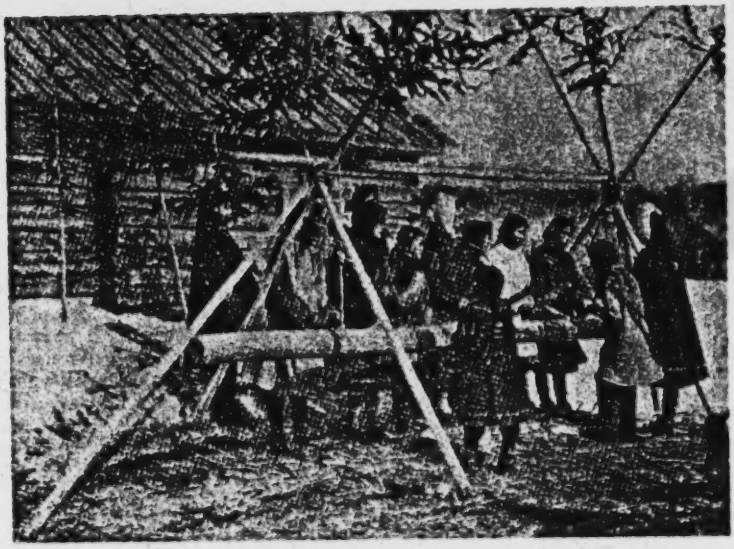

Playing a wooden percussion instrument.

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The wooden religious sculpture was akin to that of the Orochi, Ul'chi and Nanay. The figurines of bears on dippers and spoons used in the bear festival were finely made and realistic in style. The bear dippers were often remarkable in their craftsmanship. Some of them were carved with pictographs, relating the history of the hunt or rearing of a given bear. The carvings on the dipper handles were also symbolic; they indicated by a variety of symbols whether the bear was killed in a hunt or reared in captivity, whether it was killed in the summer; and so forth.

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The musical culture of the Nivkhi was very poor. They played a primitive one-string instrument (t'yngryng) and a lip jew's-harp (kkangga). During the bear festivals they used, instead of musical instruments, an ordinary log, which the women struck with sticks.

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Education was entirely lacking among the Nivkhi before the Revolution. The Nivkhi-Nanay alphabet written in the 1880's by the missionary, Protod'yakonov, was not used by the Nivkhi.

In 1895 an elementary school was opened in the city of Mariinsk; two others were opened in 1899. By 1905 they were closed for lack of funds. Only a few individual Nivkhi attended Russian schools.

Contemporary Life of the Nivkhi

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In 1918, soon after the establishment of the Soviet government in the Far East, this area, and especially the Amur Basin and Sakhalin, became the scene of civil war and intervention. Guerrilla units were organized to fight the White Guards and interventionists. The bitter fighting lasted several years.

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In the beginning of 1920, the laboring people of Sakhalin overthrew General Kolchak's appointees and reestablished the Soviet regime, which immediately began to organize contacts between the Russian revolutionary workers and peasants and the Nivkhi and other peoples of Sakhalin. However, the Soviets lasted only three months in Sakhalin. In April 1920, the Japanese landed on the island and seized the city of Aleksandrovsk. The poorly armed Red Guard units were compelled to retreat and withdraw to the taiga. They became guerrillas and, joined by men who escaped from the interventionists, they engaged in a stubborn fight against the invaders. The Nivkhi took part in the struggle side by side with the Russians, rendering substantial aid to the guerrillas by transporting their units in dogsleds from district to district. The occupants, afraid of the guerrilla movement, initiated brutal retaliation against the population. Many fighters for the Revolution were executed. The terror and violence went on for 5 years. It was not until January 1925, after the Japanese troops were expelled from the Far East, that Japan signed an agreement ceding the northern part of Sakhalin to Russia. By May 15, the Red guerrillas mopped up the last remnants of the interventionists in northern Sakhalin; since then, the Soviet government has been firmly in control of the area.

In August 1945, the Soviet Army liberated southern Sakhalin from the Japanese invaders, and Soviet people came to the immemorially Russian lands. Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk developed on the site of the former Vladimirovka.

The period of Japanese intervention brought great suffering to the Nivkhi. Their economy was completely disrupted. The Japanese shamelessly took away their fishing areas, fostered drunkenness, sowed dissension among Nivkhi clans. Drunken sailors raped Nivkhi women and beat up their husbands. The Nivkhi endured extreme poverty and entire villages died out from hunger and diseases. The Japanese also made serious inroads into the natural resources of Sakhalin. They carelessly exterminated sable, musk deer, and wild reindeer; they devastated fishing waters, bays and small rivers. They chopped down forests without any plan and did nothing to combat forest enemies. A great deal of forest was destroyed by fires. Coal and oil resources were also plundered.

In 1929, native village soviets and two native Rayon Executive Committees were established, replacing the initial village and rayon committees—revkoms (revolutionary committees). In 1933, 63 Nivkhi were elected to native and Russian village soviets, 30 Nivkhi were elected to the two native Rayon Executive Committees, and 5 to the Sakhalinskaya Oblast Executive Committee. The Nivkhi were equally active in the village soviets on the continent.

Formerly illiterate and extremely backward economically and culturally, the Nivkhi were gradually drawn into the work of various Soviet organizations—becoming a part of a new, hitherto unknown, culture. Their political activity also expanded and developed. The former distrust of Russians, resulting from the arbitrary rule of the tsarist administration and, later, from the conduct of the Whites who worked with the Japanese interventionists on the island and along the Lower Amur, began to disappear. We must not forget the vast initial gulf between the Nivkhi and Soviet cultures. Of all the Amur peoples, the Nivkhi, particularly on Sakhalin, were the most deprived. They were people who depended wholly on the harsh nature surrounding them, who were isolated in the narrow circle of family and clan interests, who fearfully shunned new and unknown people. The socialist reorganization of Nivkhi life on the continent proceeded along the same patterns as that of the other peoples of the Lower Amur region, akin to the Nivkhi in their life and culture such as the Negidals, Ul'chi and Nanays.

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Among the Sakhalin Nivkhi, who differed in their economy and material culture from the above peoples, socialist reconstruction followed a somewhat different pattern. Many Nivkhi went to work in fishing and lumbering enterprises. The first Primary Productive Organizations were organized among the Nivkhi in 1927. Subsequently, the Nivkhi began to socialize the instruments and means of production—nets, boats, dogs, etc., and went on to a more advanced form of social production—the agricultural cooperative. A part of the Nivkhi population joined Russian collective farms, situated near Nivkhi villages.

As they learned new methods of conducting their economic activities and mastered new techniques of production in the collectives, the Nivkhi began to develop new economic activities, formerly unknown to them; tillage, gardening and cattle-breeding. At first, the work of the Primary Productive Organizations, particularly on the eastern coast, where villages lie at considerable distances from one another, was seasonal in character. The Nivkhi gathered at the fishing camp from several nearby villages and fished cooperatively for 3-4 months, after which they dispersed. In winter, they engaged in carting, using dogs as draught animals. Later the cooperatives became permanent. As a rule a collective farm was first made up of the inhabitants of one village. But larger collectives also developed, such as the "Chir-Unvd" ("New Life") collective, which united the economies of three villages along the middle course of the Tym' River (Kirovskiy Rayon). An important role in the organization of collectives was played by the Nivkhi youth, particularly by members of the Komsomol.

The organization of collectives and their successful development were openly resisted by the rich Nivkhi and former elders. The greatest resistance was to the building of new collective-farm villages and the resettlement of the members in new sites. The resettlement was necessitated by the need to enlarge the villages, which had often consisted of two or three houses, and to transfer them to more convenient places, nearer to good fishing areas. The Soviet government spent large sums on this. Most of the collective members left their old smoky dwellings and moved to new, bright homes.

At present, fishing occupies an important place in the Nivkhi economy. The former primitive fishing methods have been abandoned. Along with seines, the fishermen set up more efficient zayezdki; manually worked scoops have given way to winches; fish is transported on Amur sailboats (kungasy) and cutters; and Motor-Fishing Stations (MRS) provide extensive aid to the collective fishermen.

Many Nivkhi collective members participate today in fishing expeditions. To do so, they travel to Okhotsk and other districts. Expedition fishing usually lasts from April to August. It is also carried on in Sakhalin, where the continental Nivkhi also come to work. In spring, the members of the fishing collectives hunt seal in the estuary and on Sakhalin. In winter, they hunt fur-animals.

Agriculture is a new branch of economic activity among the Sakhalin Nivkhi. The first Nivkhi agricultural collective, "Chir-Unvd," was organized in 1930 along the basin of the Tym' River in northern Sakhalin. In 1937, the collective already consisted of some 50 households. Its acreage under cultivation rose from 1.5 hectares in the first year of its existence to 61 hectares in 1937. The main crop was potatoes. The collective farm has its own skilled agricultural personnel—brigadiers and team leaders—although there was a time when the Nivkhi considered agriculture a great sin. As the old men used to say, "He who digs or plants will die."

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In 1951, the Nivkhi collective "Chir-Unvd" collected 200 tsentners of potatoes and cabbage per hectare. In the course of only 3 years, from 1949 to 1951, the cultivated area increased by 30%.

Along with agriculture, the "Chir-Unvd" collective engages in animal husbandry. Since the war, it has substantially increased its herd of cattle and established a sheep-breeding farm. Other Nivkhi collectives have also progressed.

An essential prerequisite for the successful organization and development of collective farms was the unification of small villages, formerly scattered over large distances. Before the Revolution, Nivkhi villages often consisted of no more than 3-5 households. But even in the larger villages, the houses were scattered without plan. The enlargement of old villages and the construction of new populated centers made rapid strides after the collectivization of the Nivkhi economy. The modern Nivkhi villages are comfortable, well planned, and laid out in streets. In the building of new villages, particular attention is given to selecting convenient and wholesome sites. Before the Revolution, most of the Sakhalin Nivkhi lived in dugouts, and most of the continental Nivkhi lived in frame huts resembling the Manchu-Chinese fanza.

The most widespread of the new dwellings is the warm Russian log house. Near the houses of the collective members are various barns, sheds, etc. Every collective-farm village has a number of public buildings; a school, a reading room, a club, an administrative building, and buildings devoted to economic uses (a collective-farm garage, a smithy, a vegetable storehouse, cattle-yards, etc.). Almost every collective-farm village has a bathhouse—something the Nivkhi never used in the past. Today, many individual collective-farm families build their own private bathhouses.

The internal furnishings of the Nivkhi home have also changed, and are today similar to those of Russian homes. Some collective-farm villages have electricity and radio. In the Nivkhi homes, especially on the continent, one often sees plastered and whitewashed walls, or walls covered with wallpaper, and a variety of bought furniture, as well as curtains and flowers in the windows. The Nivkhi are very fond of pictures, and adorn the walls of their homes with illustrations, placards and photographs.

Today, the Nivkhi widely wear bought clothing of the Russian type. They also use underwear, which was entirely unknown in the past. In winter, the continental Nivkhi wear city-type coats, felt boots, high overshoes, and also footwear of elk or seal skins. The Sakhalin Nivkhi prefer clothing made of reindeer or seal skins. They obtain the reindeer skins from Orok collective-farm members. The fur clothing and headdress remain of the traditional cut and materials. Many Nivkhi women make their own clothing of factory-made fabrics, bought in stores opened in collective-farm villages. Here and there, one encounters the ancient national costume. On holidays, the young people love to wear robes made of fabric and richly ornamented. Such robes are made even today. Clothing of fishskin is almost discontinued, as are the old conical birchbark hats.

Substantial changes have taken place in the Nivkhi diet. There is greater use of vegetables, bread, butter, tea, sugar and other purchased products. The incidence of illness, and particularly of tuberculosis, which had been widespread in the past, has dropped sharply as a result of radically improved sanitary conditions and the wide network of medical institutions. Already during the early years of the Soviet regime, hospitals and medical and maternity centers were opened for the Nivkhi, but wide educational work was needed to accustom the Nivkhi to use these institutions for medical aid. Soviet medicine rapidly won the confidence of the Nivkhi.

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Ch. Taksami, student at Leningrad University, at a student ball in the Kremlin palace.

Today the Nivkhi are served by an extensive network of diverse medical institutions; in addition, specialist physicians visit the most remote collective-farm villages. One of the initial tasks of the Soviet government was to bring the children into the schools and to liquidate illiteracy among the adults. Schools were opened in Sakhalin during the very first years after the establishment of the Soviet government there. A group of Nivkhi young people were sent to school on the continent, and adults were taught at centers for the liquidation of illiteracy.

A Nivkhi alphabet was created in 1931. In 1932, the first schoolbooks were published. During the 1933-34 school year, some 300 children were already at school in the Sakhalinskaya Oblast, which meant 86% of all Nivkhi children of school age. It was possible to assure daily attendance only after the establishment of dormitories. Today all children attend school. In the village of Kal'ma there is an elementary seven-year school; in Nogliki there is a ten-year school. A part of the Nivkhi youth (boys) attend trade schools in Komosol'sk and factory schools in Komsomol'sk and Nikolayevsk-on-the-Amur.

177 Many Nivkhi with secondary schooling enter higher educational institu-
648 tions. In 1953, 2 Nivkhi attended Leningrad State University, and 10 studied
873 at the A. I. Herzen Pedagogical Institute. At present, 16 Nivkhi are attending the institute. Among the students there are also women. In 1953, Liza Dekhal' of the village of Pad on the Amur graduated successfully from the A. I. Herzen Institute in Leningrad. The Nivkhi Chuner Taksami of the [463] village of Kal'ma is today doing graduate work at the Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences. Nivkhi with special training are working today as captains, enginemen on cutters, teachers, librarians and club directors.

177 The political activity of Nivkhi workers has grown tremendously. Many
648 have risen to leading posts on collective farms and in various institutions;
474 many work as instructors with rayon Party committees and executive committees.

[641] Wide educational work among the Nivkhi has been conducted and is conducted today by the cultural bases established on their territory. The first of these was founded in 1928-29 in the village of Nogliki, at the mouth of the Tym' River in Vostochno-Sakhalinskiy Rayon. The second cultural base of the peoples of the North was founded on Sakhalin in 1946, in the village of Yukovo. These bases have libraries, reading rooms, clubs, seven-year schools for Nivkhi and Evenk children, and also dormitories and boarding schools.

[52] At the amateur concerts on the collective farms, both men and women entertain, singing and performing native and Russian dances. Frequently the songs are created on the spot, impromptu. The collective-farm youth also participate in regional Olympic games.

[545] Theatre arts are also developing among the Nivkhi. In the beginning, the Nivkhi, who had never seen a theatre before the Revolution, were merely spectators at performances organized by Russians. Soon, however, dramatic clubs were organized in the collective-farm clubhouses, and the Nivkhi began to present plays in their own language.

[526] The Nivkhi are great lovers of sports. In former times they did not know how to swim and feared the water. Today the Nivkhi young people enthusiastically engage in water sports. There are now special sports omorochki (canoes) with a single oar, in which young men and women hold speed races. The Nivkhi have also preserved native sports, such as rope-jumping.

[182] The changed working, living and cultural conditions of Nivkhi life—the collectivization of their economy, their participation in industry, the unification in collective-farm villages of people who had formerly belonged to different clans, and the general rise in their cultural level—all these factors have completely destroyed the old ties and rules, based on the numerous remnants of clan relations which had survived until the Revolution. The old 177 religious ideas, holidays and rituals have lost all their meaning. The
648 greatest change has occurred in the position of women. In former times, the
562 Nivkhi woman was timid and oppressed, and knew only the narrow circle of her domestic duties. She could be bought and sold, or turned out of the house. When she met men, she had to cover her face and turn her back to them. During the early post-Revolutionary years, a great deal of effort had to be applied toward the elimination of survivals of the past. When they attempted to study, many young women and girls were ridiculed by their fr ers, husbands and mothers. Some were unable to withstand the pressure and discontinued their studies. It proved especially difficult to overcome the ancient custom of placing a woman in childbed in a special hut, built near the dwelling. This tent was usually cold and damp. The woman had to remain under these conditions for several days without any help,

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endangering her own health and that of the child. The force of tradition was so strong that even in 1932 some of the women stubbornly refused to have their babies in hospitals, despite the good care and the free clothing and blankets which were given to the infants. It was only after wide medical-educational work that women began to turn to maternity hospitals. The new understanding of the role and importance of medical institutions has also led many Nivkhi women to go to work in them as attendants and later as nurses, educated at the medical school in Nikolayevsk-on-the-Amur.

Today the Nivkhi woman manages her own life and does not enter into forced marriage. Polygamy, the levirate and remnants of the old group marriage have become things of the past.

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